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## SUGGESTIONS FROM THE DAY SCHOOL FOR SUNDAY-SCHOOL WORKERS.

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IN the day school the study of geography ordinarily begins with the grammar-school course and continues for five years. The children at the beginning of this study are approximately nine years of age, and at its conclusion they are about fourteen years of age. For the sake of definiteness the illustrations and suggestions of this paper will be confined to this period of child life.

In all phases of intellectual education we recognize an intimate connection between thing, idea, and word; in more general terms, between reality, thought, and language. Word and language cannot have for the child appropriate meaning till he has the appropriate experience. Hence it is a psychological necessity to start with the child's experiences; to make indefinite and chaotic experiences definite and orderly; to supply pattern experiences; to connect his experiences with the appropriate language.

The teacher may begin at either end of the series, but progress and clearness require that the entire series be mastered. Much indefinite and hazy work results from the wordiness of instruction. The constant problem in teaching children is to make language significant. In the Sunday school there seems to be a necessity to start with the language end of the series, and much of the verbal instruction there fails to get associated with any experience, and is accordingly faulty.

Moreover, the present generation of children comes to any subject of study with an open-mindedness and an independence of judgment that were unknown a quarter of a century ago. It is important for the Sunday-school teacher to recognize and respect this mental quality. This change in mental habit and

in mental docility among school children is sufficient to make necessary a modification of methods of instruction in Sunday schools. That this feeling is widely felt by thoughtful men is evidenced by the numerous lesson schemes and lesson helps which have sprung into being during the past decade.

The limited time at the disposal of the Sunday-school teacher makes it necessary to determine with care what to teach. We must recognize once for all that the modern day school now does the work for which Sunday schools were originally established. It is important at the outset to determine the real aim of our Sunday-school work.

The principal aim is to give a knowledge of the Bible, to develop a spirit of reverent inquiry into its meaning, to foster the social and religious virtues which lie at the basis of a healthful relationship between the maturing personality and his fellows, between himself and his God. The well-ordered Sunday school becomes the children's church, and is for most children their only place of worship. Its importance as furnishing an appropriate occasion for the exercise of the appropriate religious emotions is apparent.

Religious history, religious theory—in fact, religious instruction in any form, as such—the public schools are debarred from giving. Some such instruction, with a development of appropriate religious sentiments, is essential to a healthy mental life. The Bible story has become so inwrought into English and American history and literature that an intimate knowledge of the Bible is a practical necessity.

It is important also to recognize the fact that in many points affecting a child's manners, morals, and positive religious sentiments, an outsider can often do a service which is impossible for any member of the immediate family.

The chief work of the Sunday school, then, is to do this necessary, supplementary work that cannot be adequately done by either home or school.

The amount to be attempted in any lesson or any year will depend largely upon the knowledge and skill of the teacher. The method of attack will depend very much upon the age and

capacity of the learners. There are, however, manifest stages of development that determine to quite an extent the type of work. These stages may be characterized as the story stage, the descriptive stage, the explanatory stage. By previous limitation our period falls mainly within the descriptive stage.

It is fair to assume a reasonable knowledge of the common geographical objects: land forms, water forms, air and its properties, plants, animals, people, heat, gravity. These ideas have been gained by perception. There has been a constant experience of realities. The effort has been first of all "to teach the child to see the things which he looks at." Memory has been an unimportant factor. In the second phase of this descriptive work in the day school there has been a conscious effort to develop insight by the use of judgment, inference, comparison, generalization. The counsel is: "In the presence of phenomena, make the pupil attentive and reflective."

From the study of real geographical objects in connection with pictures, maps, and blackboard representations, the significance of maps is made perfectly clear. With this basis of fact and experience, it is possible to create in the mind of an average twelve-year-old child an adequate representation of any scene in Palestine, provided the teacher clearly understands what he wishes to do and properly grades his steps. It is not, however, necessary for children to know ancient Palestine in great detail; and in all probability Christ's mission will be far more significant to them if geography and history are not made too realistic. This fact, however, does not lessen by one iota the importance of making the work that is attempted clear, definite, and full of meaning.

It is a serious charge against the Sunday school that it fails to give definite knowledge of the essential biblical facts. When the teacher makes this a definite aim, it can be accomplished. An important defect in our teaching hitherto has been its multitude of aims, variety of subjects, desultory character, and desolate result.

The first specific suggestion that the modern day-school teacher has to offer is a suggestion of definiteness. This means

definite purpose in the lesson, familiarity with the subject-matter, orderliness in presentation, definite drill upon the essentials of the lesson. This program should be followed with enthusiasm, and with a studious avoidance of preaching till preaching finds a natural place for itself.

The corollaries to the law of definiteness are many, and they concern the work of the children as well as that of the teacher.

1. The lesson should begin with the *near*, with the wagon rather than with the star. This means not alone the visible and tangible, but what is in the mind of the pupil, rather than what is in the teacher's mind.

2. The work should constantly touch the experience of the learner, though its trend may follow the ideal of the teacher.

3. The work must be attractive, must win the interest and approval of the pupil, and should result in entertaining thought.

4. The teacher should teach before testing. The order is : teach, drill, test.

The second suggestion of the teacher in the day school is a counsel to recognize in moral and religious instruction the importance of impressions that cannot be tested. Many of the finest virtues mature in silence even in the Sunday school.

The third suggestion recognizes the importance of the time element. Human knowledge is imperfect and partial. Increasing knowledge should be educative and emancipative, and yet a confirmation of rational faith. Each generation endeavors to educate its children by giving them all the knowledge and all the training requisite for life in the civilization into which they are born. In this work of emancipation by education time is an important factor. The desired product is not the precipitate of a single lesson, nor can a satisfactory result be accomplished by phrasing a high-sounding paragraph and getting that committed to memory. The best things in life do not ordinarily come to us ready-made.

The fourth suggestion concerns the method. Tradition dictates the conversational method, and theory counsels the same. Question and answer is an old device, but its skilful use is sure to provoke interest as well as thought. It is not necessary to

settle every question of fact. It is better to arouse the pupil so that he will have in mind pretty constantly an unanswered what or why.

In passing it may be said that the methods of teaching in the Sunday school cannot be codified. Much will depend upon the teacher's ability to make attractive problems out of Scripture passages.

The fifth suggestion counsels the Sunday-school teacher to be a student. It is a commonplace of education that the maximum of knowledge or the maximum of expression is not the highest educational aim. However, thorough knowledge of the subject-matter on the teacher's part lightens the burden of immediate preparation, gives confidence to the teacher, commands the respect of the class, and insures a better perspective in the instruction. The teacher's method of preparation and of personal study should result in increasing knowledge, deeper insight, and intellectual growth, as well as moral and religious development. It was Geikie, the father of modern geography, who said: "Know pieces of knowledge before attempting to know the logical order." This is good advice for the Sunday-school teacher, but in time the teacher should mature his insight into the logical order.

The methods of the physical sciences and mathematics have so long dominated our thinking that we sometimes forget that mechanical explanation is not the only type. It is, therefore, highly important that the teacher should master the doctrine of explanation. He should distinguish between phases of work expressed by the terms "descriptive" and "explanatory," "narrative" and "critical." The children should be kept mainly upon the descriptive, narrative plane, but the teacher's mastery of the doctrine of explanation and critical insight into problems will give him greater confidence in his work and save him from the fruitless effort to explain the unexplainable. The human mind has its limitations. It is impossible to think the unthinkable, and it is misleading to picture the unpicturable.

The human mind, however, seeks for some connection among its objects of knowledge. This is its demand for explanation.

To any particular mind a thing or event is explained when it is accounted for in a way to set that mind at rest. A child is easily satisfied by a name. So are many older people. This is the simplest type of explanation, *i. e.*, simple classification expressed by a name.

A second type of explanation is a reference of a thing or an object of knowledge to its genus and species, with a statement of its specific difference, in a definition.

A third type is a reference of an object or event to its antecedents by a system of uniformities of laws.

A fourth type refers things, events, effects, actions to the nature and constitution of self-active agents. This type of explanation involves a comprehensive knowledge of mental phenomena, insight into the doctrine of self-activity, and it includes the reference of all finite things and events to Deity as the First Cause.

There are manifestly grades of explanation. The answer to a child's why must often be very different from that to the adult's query. This fact has an important bearing upon scriptural interpretation. The appropriate type of interpretative explanation is in each case to be chosen with care. With children it is unwise as well as impossible to touch the fundamentals of human thought. Most teachers, however, in their own study will be helped by the effort.

We have dwelt so long in the realm of second causes that we sometimes forget that we have not reached the ultimate limit. Nothing can be more helpful and steadying for the thoughtful superintendent and the progressive teacher than a critical and frequent reading of Dr. Gordon's *The Christ of To-Day*, Professor Bowne's *The Philosophy of Theism*, and Dr. John Fiske's little book, *Through Nature to God*, in which he brings the facts of evolution so cogently to assert the everlasting reality of religion.

The following suggestions are offered as a supplement to the foregoing general considerations :

1. No teacher should teach a class of children who are under twelve years of age for more than two years.

2. The essential facts of the geography of Palestine should be taught as geography, and the pupils should be held responsible for the accuracy of their knowledge.

3. With each locality important scriptural persons and events should be associated.

4. A limited number of important scriptural passages should be *accurately* learned. It would be a shock to cultured ears to hear many a boy honestly recite a passage in the Lord's Prayer, "hollered be thy name."

5. The essential facts in the life of Christ should be taught as facts, without any attempt to give the full theological significance of each event.

6. Teach the children to read the Bible and to appreciate a reading which interprets the passage under consideration. Much of the effectiveness of Sunday-school teaching depends upon the teacher's being a sympathetic reader and an appreciative listener.

7. Read to the class, and have the class read, gems of literature which inculcate appropriate religious sentiments.

8. Let the teacher's work be characterized by devotion, genuineness, sincerity, heartiness, love, intelligence, and in the teaching of even plain geography his personality will effectively touch his entire class.

Wherever more rational methods and more systematic plans for the Sunday school are adopted and intelligently applied, the attendance at Sunday school becomes more regular, the children are more interested in their work and more studious, while it is possible to enlist as teachers a larger number of experienced day-school teachers, and other capable, conscientious persons who have hitherto not been available; and service in the Sunday school under these changed conditions contributes alike to the edification and happiness of the teacher and the taught.